DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 164 553 TM 007 245

AUTHOR	Morton, Alice
TITLE	Measuring Potential and Evaluating Results. Managing Your Public Relations: Guidelines for Nonprofit Organizations.
INSTITUTION	National Communication Council for Human Services, Inc., New York, N.Y.; Public Relations Society of America, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Ittleson Family Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	77
NOTE	24p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Public Relations Society of America, 845 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022 ($2.50, quantity discount available)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Data Collection; *Evaluation Methods; Formative Evaluation; Fund Raising; Guidelines; Information Utilization; *Nonprofit Organizations; Organizational Communication; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Publicize; *Public Relations

ABSTRACT

Guidelines for evaluating the public relations activities of nonprofit organizations are presented. Evaluation methods frequently include one of three major forms: (1) comprehensive audit conducted by a new staff member or an outside consultant; (2) regularly scheduled administrative review; or (3) short-term review following every activity. The steps involved in any evaluation include planning, information gathering, analysis of findings, planning for action, and reporting of results. Information about future needs may be acquired through an analysis of questions and requests received, observation of comprehensive checklists, and staff reports. Quantitative assessments of effectiveness can be based upon media coverage of press releases, cost effectiveness of agency publications, and distribution of other materials. Opinions and attitudes of users or potential users are best measured by survey questionnaires or interviews. Sources of consultants who conduct outside evaluations include professional associations, universities, and public relations counseling firms. A number of examples are briefly presented in this guide. (GDC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Managing Your Public Relations:

Guidelines for Nonprofit Organizations

Measuring Potential and Evaluating Results

ED164553

TM007 245

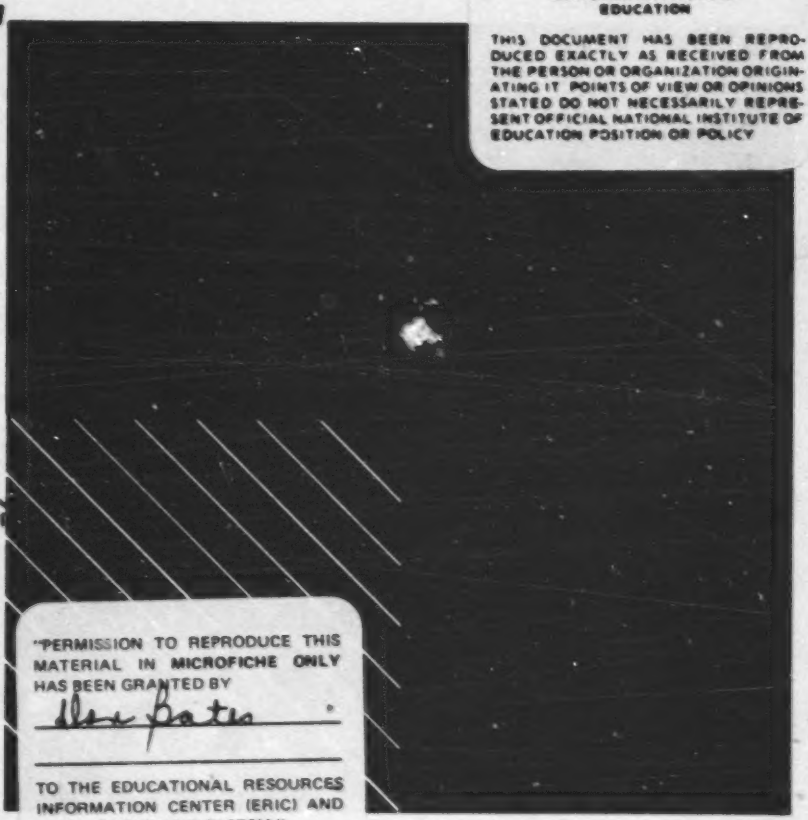
U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Alice Norton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."



Alice Norton

About the Author

Alice Norton operates Alice Norton Public Relations, a small counseling firm in Ridgefield, Connecticut that specializes in services to libraries and other nonprofit educational agencies. An M.S. recipient in library science from the University of Illinois, and an Accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America, she conducts public relations workshops and seminars for graduate library schools at colleges and universities around the country. Her publications include *Public Relations: Information Sources* (Gale) and numerous articles in journals and magazines.

Managing Your Public Relations:

Guidelines for Nonprofit Organizations

General Editor:
Frances A. Koestler

Titles in this series:

Planning and Setting Objectives
by Frances A. Koestler

Using Publicity to Best Advantage
by Frances Schmidt

Working with Volunteers
by Dorothy Ducas

Making the Most of Special Events
by Harold N. Weiner

Measuring Potential and Evaluating Results
by Alice Norton

Using Standards to Strengthen Public Relations
by Anne L. New and Don Bates

Price and order information:
Single copy: $2.50
Complete series of six: $12.00
Quantities at discount

Send orders to:
Public Relations Society of America,
845 Third Avenue,
New York, NY 10022
(212) 826-1750

Managing Your Public Relations:

Guidelines for Nonprofit Organizations

Measuring Potential and Evaluating Results

by
Alice Norton

Published by:

National Communication Council for Human Services, Inc.
consolidated January 1, 1977 with
Public Relations Society of America
845 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022

© 1977 by
National Communication Council
for Human Services, Inc.

This guide, and the series of
which it is a companion volume,
was made possible by a grant from
the Ittleson Foundation.

Design by Andréa Marquez

Foreword

This management guide is one of a series of six designed to assist administrators and board members of nonprofit organizations to understand the principles and practices of sound public relations.

The guides cover six major areas: planning, publicity, volunteers, special events, evaluation, standards. They are applicable to a broad range of nonprofit organizations: health and social welfare agencies, hospitals, libraries, museums, educational and religious institutions, citizen groups interested in community betterment, civil liberties and other concerns.

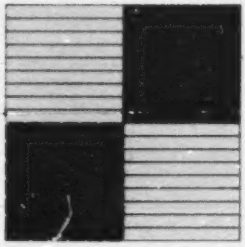
Appreciation is expressed to the Ittleson Foundation whose generous grant to the National Communication Council for Human Services made possible the writing and production of these guides. NCC, formerly the National Public Relations Council of Health & Welfare Services, was consolidated with the Public Relations Society of America on January 1, 1977.

Development of the series was directed by the National Communication Council's Publications Committee with the encouragement and support of NCC's Board of Directors and its president Carlton E. Spitzer. Don Bates, NCC executive director, served as staff consultant and production coordinator.

NCC Publications Committee

Chairman: Frances Schmidt, director of development and alumni affairs, Columbia University School of Social Work.

Members: Silvia Bakst, director, community relations, Long Island Jewish-Hillside Medical Center; Frances A. Koestler, public relations consultant; John H. McMahon, director of public relations, State Communities Aid Association; Saul Richman, information officer, Council on Foundations.



Measuring Potential and Evaluating Results

If your organization reduced or eliminated the time and money spent on public relations, what difference would it make? As an administrator or board member, you should be in a position to answer that question. Evaluation – the measurement of results – is not easy. But, for good management, it is essential to know how much each part of any nonprofit organization's program contributes toward the attainment of its goals. Public relations is no exception.

Evaluation is usually thought of as the final step in the public relations process. But it is more than that – it is an essential element in the initial assessment of opinions and attitudes in the various groups with whom the organization deals.

Why is evaluation sometimes neglected in otherwise soundly conceived public relations programs? One reason may be the impossibility of gaining accurate, quantitative answers to questions that necessarily lack the precision of those tackled in scientific research. Even without complete scientific accuracy, however, evaluation of public relations can supply valuable indicators of past and present performance. And by identifying potential problem areas, evaluation can serve as a guide to future action.

If conscious study of results seems like a time-consuming new process, don't assume you aren't *now* evaluating public relations. You're involved in evaluation every time you ask (and answer) questions like: What shall we do differently this year to increase the number of persons who use our services? Which will carry this message most effectively – a series of pamphlets, a film, radio and television spots, other media? More and more people are calling on us for information, but does this have any effect on their actions?

Evaluation should be so closely imbedded into an organization's public relations program that it is continuous and almost automatic. Holding the key in this process is the person who has the responsibility for coordinating public relations activities. In a small organization, this will be the administrator or perhaps a part-time public relations consultant. In a larger agency, it will be a public relations director. Actually, everyone who is involved in the public relations program should play a part in its evaluation. And this includes the persons for whom the agency exists – the consumers or potential consumers of its services.

Whatever the size of the organization, outside specialists sometimes can bring an objective view which insiders may not perceive. A management consultant who was asked to evaluate the public relations program of a national health agency found that the editing and production of technical materials for all departments left the public relations staff with too little time for its main purpose, public information. The recommendation: divide the responsibilities into two departments and free the public information staff for the tasks of communication through the mass media and for service to regional chapters. The plan was implemented with success.

Evaluation Methods

5

Current public relations research methods range from the scientific (the most reliable) to the intuitive (varying in quality). Within this range, one specialist has noted, are a number of valuable practices which do not entail the time and cost of scientific research: observation, listening, study of data the organization already possesses, informal questioning and interviewing.

Whatever the method, public relations evaluation most often takes one of three major forms. The first is a comprehensive study of an organization's public relations program, a process sometimes referred to as a public relations audit. The initial such audit is apt to take place when the first professional public relations person is hired, either as a staff member or as an outside consultant. The audit may be repeated periodically.

The Public Relations Board, a counseling firm that has conducted audits for clients for more than 20 years, has developed procedures in three phases: research, analysis and planning. All center on the audit's particular objectives. Included in the research phase are surveys or interviews conducted both outside and inside the organization in order to assess opinions and attitudes. During the analysis phase, the audit team studies all the data they have gathered.

Finally, the team develops short-range and long-range plans through which the organization can attain its communications goals. These plans usually contain suggestions for new programs and additional forms of communication. For organizations that incorporate evaluation and planning into ongoing operations, the Board says that a comprehensive audit may only be required every five years.

A second form of evaluation is a regular review of the entire public relations program as part of the organization's ongoing administrative schedule. For example, if the staff conducts annual self-reviews followed by reports to the board, the public relations evaluation should conform to that schedule.

The third form of public relations evaluation is the short-term review which should follow every activity, from the announcement of a new service to the sponsorship of a major special event. All those involved in the project should pool their ideas about what was achieved and what they would do differently another time. Brief written notes of such discussions will prove useful when the time comes to carry out a similar activity.

The scope of short-term reviews can often be enlarged to incorporate information collected over a period of time. When, for example, an organization wishes to measure changes in attitudes and actions caused by the introduction of a new service, the staff should start collecting information several months before the service is introduced and continue for at least two or three months afterward.

These three forms of evaluation vary in purpose and scope, but the major steps are the same. They are:

Planning. Public relations offers almost endless opportunities for action and communication. When time and money run out, there is always the danger that evaluation will be omitted unless it has a firm place in the public relations timetable and an appropriate share of the budget. It also is important to include time in staff schedules for measuring the effect of each individual activity. When many people are expected to play a part in evaluation, it is less likely that this valuable process will be overlooked.

Preparation for evaluation brings another advantage. It reminds those who are planning a project to identify in advance those things that can be counted. If the goal of an activity is to supply information, to cause action or to change attitudes, it is essential to collect data to find out what happened. For example, YMCAs in the Delaware Valley tested the effectiveness of public service radio and television spot announcements during one membership campaign by incorporating an offer to supply the address of the nearest Y to any person who phoned a given number. Each person who called the 24-

hour phone center was asked for his name and address. The following day the Y's Communications Cooperative that coordinated the campaign mailed the information to callers and sent the name of each caller to his or her local Y.

This procedure did more than test the effectiveness of the overall campaign. Because placement of the spots with the media had been made by the staff of each local Y, heavy response in a community indicated that local stations had been motivated to air the spots often, while lack of response in a community suggested that the local Y staff may not have worked effectively with local station personnel. To remedy this, the Communications Cooperative sponsored mass media workshops in those regions that showed a need for training. The observably successful response to the radio and television campaign had another result. It placated staff and board members who previously had complained to the public relations consultant: "We never hear or see any Y announcements."

Public relations may never become an exact science, but it can support more rigorous research than it has in the past. This will require more precise record-keeping. In planning an evaluation program it is important to make a schedule for the various steps, identifying the person who will be responsible for each, and formulate a budget. When you are justifying your budget for evaluation (to yourself or others), remember that the information gathered is important for planning future public relations activities as well as for measuring past ones.

Information Gathering. Much of the information you need for evaluation is already on hand within your own organization. This may include:

- Statistics and other records on the services offered and the persons who use them. A study of the addresses, ages, occupations, and interests of those your organization serves will tell you whether you are missing geographical areas of your community or failing to reach particular age or occupational groups.

- Phone calls, letters, in-person queries, suggestions and complaints. (Suggestion boxes are often useful.)

- Press clippings and records of radio and television announcements and programs.

- Reports (both formal and informal) from agency staff and board members.

Involvement of staff in this information-gathering process does more than supply valuable information. By making the evaluation a *self*-study, it lowers staff resistance to the threat of change.

Studies in which social scientists or market research specialists analyze changes in opinions and in patterns of life can often shed light on your own organization. For example, general opinion and attitude polls that show a growing skepticism about nonprofit bodies and the credibility of their spokesmen will give you clues about the attitudes in your community toward your organization. By the same token, it was of importance to all religious organizations when polls taken by the Gallup Organization found that in five years there had been a 36 percent decrease in the belief that "religion is declining in importance."

The findings of general surveys can be put to specific use. For example, in the American Cancer Society's 1975 study of the incidence of cigarette smoking among teenagers and young women the purpose was to understand the dynamics of what was occurring and determine what steps could be taken to reverse the trend. The researchers found that although the majority of teenage girls do not smoke, 82 percent of this group think of teenagers as smokers. As a result the American Cancer Society has been trying, through media campaigns, to counter this "bandwagon" attitude among teenage girls.

In another example, a national poll revealed that a major motivation for contributing to charitable causes is the belief that an agency is working to prevent a disease or social ill. Since this report was made, all materials put out by United Cerebral Palsy Associations have emphasized what the agency is doing through research and public education to prevent cerebral palsy. Another poll, which reported that UCP ranked high in public recognition among national voluntary agencies, was used by the organization's public relations staff to bolster volunteer morale and to stimulate affiliates throughout the country to do an even better job.

If your agency is part of a national organization, you can call on its staff for help. National studies, such as a 1975 survey of the role of public libraries sponsored by state libraries and the American Library Association, can yield results that are valuable throughout the country. Librarians learned from this study that although almost half of the country's adults had been inside a library during the preceding year, a third had never used the library and a majority of these non-users were unaware of the wide range of services libraries offer. Each library that supported the study received a supplementary report on its own state.

A number of public libraries throughout the country have used the findings from a 1971 California study to justify the allocation of funds for publicity. Researchers surveyed 38 public libraries to find out whether the use of promotional activities for services increases

the appropriations a library receives from taxes. The study showed that "libraries using certain basic sales promotion devices and techniques tend to receive a larger share of the tax dollar than do libraries not using such devices and techniques." The researchers recommended that librarians become "more imaginative and more skillful in their marketing and sales promotion practices in order to maintain or increase library revenues."

In another survey with national significance, researchers investigated the relative value of the means through which women first learn about breast self-examination. Researchers found that personal discussion with a physician reaches the greatest number (23 percent). Many women also named print media as a major source (17 percent for magazine articles and 15 percent for pamphlets). An additional 8 percent first learned about the self-examinations through television, 8 percent through newspapers, and 2 percent over radio. Precise findings like these can serve as important guides for the allocation of staff time and money for the production and distribution of materials.

Every organization should conduct its own studies from time to time for evaluation of its own public relations activities. It is usually wise to start with a study of opinions among board members, staff and volunteers, and then move outward to examine the attitudes and expectations of those who now use the agency's services. A final step is to assess the opinions of various publics whom the organization does not serve but from whom it seeks understanding and support. A League of Women Voters publication suggests that every organization should examine carefully the opinions of those persons who already support and use its services.

Group discussions or free-flowing interviews may be used as a substitute for or supplement to scientific sample surveys. For the discussions a group (usually from six to nine persons) is invited to share ideas freely under the guidance of a leader. The conversation is taped, perhaps even videotaped. From the discussion come opinions and attitudes with all the reverberations of emotional content found in a relaxed conversation. These findings can become the basis for a scientific sample survey or they can be used without further research as valuable clues to the attitudes of various groups.

Persons selected for interviews can consist of recognized opinion leaders, the men or women "in the street," or a combination of the two. The interviewer has freedom in the choice of topics and the wording of questions. The results from earlier interviews sometimes become the basis for further interviews.

Group discussions and interviews are suggested when you are seeking a range of information rather than answers to specific ques-

tions. These methods also cost less (in time and money) than scientific sampling of opinion.

Sometimes a public service organization can gather information without cost by having its concerns incorporated into a market survey being conducted for commercial purposes. The head of a market research firm which regularly surveys consumer attitudes and habits for a daily newspaper's advertising department suggested to a local nonprofit organization that questions about its services might be added to the survey. Because researchers sometimes add extraneous topics in order to get more accurate results, such questions serve their purpose while supplying guidance for the organization benefitting from these no-cost findings. Remember, however, that no survey is truly "free." Everything that requires the time of staff, board members or volunteer workers is an administrative expenditure. And every evaluation, even when consultant services are donated, requires agency time.

Analysis of Findings/Planning for Action. Whether the study is a brief, informal staff look at a public relations activity or a major research project, it is important to analyze the findings and any accompanying recommendations and to determine their significance both for the immediate future and for the long term. Don't skimp on the time you spend weighing the implications of carefully collected facts. Usually, a study provides the impetus for some changes. But the choice is yours. Fact-finding may support changes but it does not mandate them.

Reporting of Results. To gain the full benefit of a study, the report should be widely shared. When the results are ignored, it may mean that those sponsoring the study lacked well-defined goals. Or perhaps the board and staff didn't really want the study to be made. To avoid this wasted effort:

- Plan your evaluation in terms of objectives that are meaningful to your organization's basic purposes. Make it clear that the goal of the study is to enhance your program and services.
- Conduct the study carefully. Involve all concerned persons at every step.
- While the study is in progress, report regularly to the board and staff.

Any study may cause anxiety among staff and volunteers, especially if evaluation has not been a traditional process in an organization. If the final report is presented in positive terms, if it avoids personalities and carries with it suggestions for improving operations, acceptance will come easier.

In a major study of attitudes it is often useful to communicate results to those who participated in the study and to the users of the agency's services. Reporting methods can take a variety of forms: a succinct written statement distributed at meetings and by mail, bulletin board posters and announcements within the organization and (when appropriate) news releases to newspapers, radio and television stations and professional journals. Such reports demonstrate that the agency is seeking objective appraisals and is open to change.

Ideally, board and staff should be so well prepared for the results of any study that the findings come as no surprise. An outside surveyor usually presents a preliminary report which the agency can examine to correct errors of fact or to suggest changes in emphasis.

Even the results of a brief study (such as a test of the relative effectiveness of radio and television for communicating a message) may be of interest to other organizations. Consider sending announcements of its findings to professional journals in your field or to media in the public relations field.

The choice of methods for any evaluation is influenced by the limits on time and money. A key element is the potential value of the findings. No one should spend $3,000 to get answers to a $300 question. Of major importance is to select for evaluation those aspects of a program that are most significant rather than those which may be easiest to measure. For example, counting column inches of space an organization gets in the press has a limited value. Studying the content of the articles and measuring their impact, however, may bring many benefits. When an overall evaluation is desired, it should cover all aspects of the public relations functions. For example, if the production of printed materials or the coordination of special events is part of the public relations program, these should be included in the evaluation.

How can you apply these principles in your own agency? On the following pages you'll find practical examples from other nonprofit organizations on a variety of techniques. You can choose from among these anything that is appropriate for your own needs and objectives.

Using Your Organization's Records

Phone and In-Person Requests. Prepare simple forms on which staff or volunteers can record phone and in-person inquiries. The minimum collected should be the number of calls and categories of subjects. It is often useful to ask what prompted this particular call or where the inquirer heard about the service. If your organization

offers to fill the request by mail or phone, the address and/or phone number of the inquirer will help determine the agency's geographical coverage. When the volume of requests is great, sample checks during brief periods can be made. But unless procedures are established for some form of checking, the staff may fail to keep any records.

Hotlines. Often special phone information services not only dispense information but also can supply useful data about the concerns of groups the organization serves or wants to serve. New York City's Save-a-Life League operates a suicide prevention phone hotline over which volunteers help troubled callers. Requests for help with other problems, such as marital conflicts, have led the League to expand its referrals to include a range of counselors.

Public Relations Checklists. Comprehensive checklists that identify the major aspects and activities of a public relations program save time and also eliminate the dangers of overlooking important areas. Hospitals throughout the country have an excellent new checklist, *Hospital Public Relations Management Development Program*, by which to assess their public relations programs. The outline has seven parts, each detailed through numerous subtopics: 1) Philosophy and Objectives, 2) Organization, 3) Financial Management, 4) Facilities, Supplies and Equipment, 5) Public Relations Programming, 6) Personnel Management, 7) Reporting. Copies may be had at $2 each from the American Society for Hospital Public Relations Directors, 840 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Staff Reports. If your organization uses standard forms for work reports by staff and volunteers, you can incorporate information needed for public relations evaluation. For example: The person who requested this service heard about it from ☐ agency publication ☐ newspaper announcement ☐ radio announcement ☐ television announcement ☐ a friend ☐ referral from another agency ☐ other (specify) ☐ doesn't remember.

Agendas for staff meetings should include evaluation of public relations activities. A discussion of agency publications, for example, could focus on: How appropriate are the topics, content, format, method of distribution? What changes should be made in current publications? What new publications are needed? A sharing of attitudes toward agency services could consider: What do those who are using our services appear to feel? What about the attitudes of various groups who are not users? Free discussions on such topics will yield useful information while demonstrating to staff and volunteers that they have a role in helping to measure the public relations program's effectiveness.

Messages and Results

You can make a quantitative assessment of how effectively your organization is communicating through the news media by keeping records of what you send out, and to whom, and comparing these with how much has been actually used. Perhaps more significant than quantity is quality. Which of your releases are being used – and in what sections of the newspaper do they appear, in what time slots are they heard on radio or seen on television? If you find you are not putting your messages across, it is not inappropriate to ask key people in the media how you might do a more effective job.

Another important yardstick is to find out how visible your organization is to those who work in the mass media. Do reporters call your organization to check facts, get an opinion on a new development, or request a comment from an agency executive? If they do, then your organization is probably considered a reliable source of current information in your field. A more detailed discussion of the foregoing will be found in the companion management guide, *Using Publicity to Best Advantage*.

The key question in evaluating mass media is, however, "What does this publicity actually accomplish?" In a pioneering study, the Stanford Heart Disease Prevention Program evaluated the results of mass media campaigns it conducted in two small California towns. The goal was to change health habits in order to reduce heart attacks. The messages were carried through radio spots and plays, television programs, newspaper advertisements and billboard posters. There were also direct mail and instructional materials sent to the schools. After two years, residents of the two towns in which the campaigns were conducted had lowered their risk of heart attacks by 24 percent in one town and 25 percent in the other. Meanwhile the risk factors rose among residents of a third town which did not have the mass media campaign.

Analyzing Media Coverage. If your organization serves a limited geographic area, the staff can read and clip the daily and weekly newspapers and any magazines or professional journals that might carry news about your program or services. If necessary you can subscribe to a state, regional or national clipping service. To keep the cost down, though, it is essential to be specific about what clippings you ask for and to check carefully on what you are getting so you can modify your requests as needed. Whatever the source of your clippings, at least once a month they should be analyzed to find out: What releases, photographs, or story ideas were used? Which ones were not used? Which publications are carrying your messages? Which ones are not?

At least once or twice a year you should make an analysis of your clippings. How much space are you getting? How does this compare with the previous year? What changes have occurred in quantity and placement? (Sample checks should be used, not a time-consuming measurement of all articles.) What messages would a person receive who only learned of your agency from the press? Are basic concerns reported or do the articles focus primarily on such news as staff appointments and peripheral services? What opinions does the reader get from signed columns, editorials or letters to the editor?

It is much harder to find out what messages about your agency are being communicated by radio and television than by the press. Stations are numerous and spot announcements may be scheduled almost around the clock. Some major cities offer radio and television monitoring services similar to press clipping services but the cost is high.

Radio and television station license renewals require that stations operate in the public interest; it is thus in their own interest to demonstrate they are providing public service time. When you deliver spot announcements to only a few stations you can ask the public service director on what day they will first be aired. Then, the day before your spots are to be aired, you can phone the station to get the exact time.

When sending spots to a number of stations, it is useful to include a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the public service director can respond about use of your material and an assessment of its quality. Alternatively, you can pursue this information through occasional phone surveys. Some major stations (primarily television) routinely send written reports stating when spots were run and what the dollar value would be if the spots had been sold.

The surest way to evaluate the effectiveness of radio and television is to build into your messages an opportunity for action by listeners/viewers. For example, offer a free pamphlet that can be requested. If representatives of your organization participate in phone-in talk shows, make tape recordings of the broadcasts to play for staff and board members and to use in evaluations.

If you lend films or slide/sound programs for group showings, ask each borrower to fill out a card indicating the size and makeup of the audience and the response. For showings your organization itself sponsors, especially when the film is new, it's a good idea to ask each person in the audience to fill out a critique.

Agency Publications. Every organization should regularly measure the value of its entire publication program in terms of cost and effec-

tiveness. Each pamphlet, poster, or report should also be studied in terms of its purpose. What is it supposed to accomplish? What is its audience, its message, and its method of distribution? For each major publication, a pre-test among representatives of the audiences at whom it is directed is worth the time required. The reactions of as few as five or six persons can help clarify meaning and modify the format or design.

For publications with large runs, two versions can be produced and distributed to different groups with pre-tests and post-tests to measure the relative effectiveness of the two pamphlets. (This method can also be employed to test the differential use of media, such as a film and a pamphlet dealing with a single subject. The film may be effective with teenagers, the pamphlet with their parents.)

A simple but useful checking device is to put yourself on the mailing list for all public relations materials. Then you'll know the arrival date and the condition in which the publication, poster, record or cassette reaches its recipients. This test can be expanded by requesting reports from a small group of recipients.

Continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of each publication shows what should be changed and what should be repeated in revisions or new publications. Here are some techniques for gauging impact: Watch those who look at it for the first time. Which pages do they look at first? How long do they spend on it? Analyze requests for information that come by phone, mail, or in person from those who already have the publication. Have these requests been prompted by the publication? Does your agency's staff refer to the publication in the course of their work?

To evaluate whether a major publication is changing attitudes or stimulating action, you may want to make sample surveys before and after distribution.

To evaluate reaction to printed publications (newsletters, annual reports, pamphlets) that are distributed by mail, one method is to enclose double postcard questionnaires with a few brief questions and space for comments. If the questions won't fit on a double postcard, use a sheet, keeping the form as short as possible. Consider enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope. This type of survey can be combined with a verification of mailing addresses. To help insure success, give brief, courteous instructions and tell why you are making the survey. Make your questions direct and easy to answer. If space permits, ask for comments.

Another method is to send a mail questionnaire to a selected list. The list can either be a random sample of all those on the mailing list (every nth name) or a group of persons whose opinions you value. Productive use of this method was made by a large corporation that

had replaced its usual annual report with two publications (one directed to specialists in investments and the other to novice investors). It sent a four-page questionnaire about the change to 500 investment advisers. The 12 percent who replied said they preferred the former one-volume report but praised the report's organization and material. The responses included a total of 208 comments which proved to be useful guides for future annual reports.

The director of the Plainedge (New York) Public Library included two questions about library publicity in a general survey on library services made among a sample of the community. The question "How do you find out about your library's programs and services?" was followed by a checklist which named each of the area newspapers and radio stations, the library's newsletter, and "other." Most of those who answered named the newsletter as their primary source of information. Another question asked the respondents to check those newsletter features that they found most useful.

Other Publicity Materials. The public relations director for the American Red Cross in a major city recommends year-round evaluation. For example, when distributing posters to post office branches he learned that delivery to one central headquarters would result in wider coverage (and of course save time). He changed procedures accordingly. The same organization had in the past believed that radio announcements and small weekly newspapers were their best communications media. Evaluation during one health information campaign, however, revealed that bus posters were equally effective. As a result the agency allocated more money for bus posters.

Where direct mail is concerned, it is wise to pre-test material by sending a sample to a small group. For major mailings, tests may be made of several versions. The Friends of the Denver Public Library mailed a membership promotion leaflet to 8 percent of the library card-holders in the city. At a cost of $5,200, the mailing attracted enough new members to garner $24,000 in additional dues that year. This successful test paved the way for additional direct mail appeals.

Also subject to evaluation are such special events as celebrations, tours, meetings, films, slide/sound shows, and exhibits. For every such activity, the sponsoring organization should formulate a purpose and define the audience (descriptive – "who?" and quantitative – "how many?"). Simple procedures can aid staff in recording both of these factors. At times it is useful to solicit audience reactions through spaces for comments in visitors books or on cards. If participants fill out registration cards, the question "Where did you learn about this event?" can be asked. A brief checklist of publicity media makes it easy to answer. Staff can make spot checks of those taking

self-guided tours or visiting exhibits to find out which areas attract most attention and which ones succeed in involving participants through recorded messages and similar devices.

Surveys and Interviews

The best way to assess the opinions and attitudes of the group you serve (or want to serve) is to commission or conduct a survey. An important corollary to what people *feel* about an organization and its services is how much people *know* about its services. For accurate results, the general principles noted below should be followed, whether market research specialists or university staff conduct a survey or you do it yourself with the help of volunteers.

You should remember, however, that any survey in which the participants are aware of being studied may yield distorted results. The use of unobtrusive measures may avoid this problem. For example, the effect of filmed messages about the dangers of smoking could be tested by observing whether there is any change in the incidence of smoking in the auditorium after the messages are shown. Other indicators of the value of these messages might be the amount of body movement while the disquieting sections are shown, or the subsequent sale of books about smoking.

The principles for conducting a survey may be summarized as follows:

- Formulate your objectives. What information are you seeking? Whose opinions do you want? What will you do with the information after you get it?

- Make a preliminary plan. Identify the people who will be involved in advisory roles and in doing the work. Estimate the funds you'll need to spend. Develop a timetable.

- Invite representatives of the groups to be surveyed to preliminary group discussions. Under the guidance of a skilled leader, a free sharing of ideas among six to nine persons will bring forth opinions and attitudes that will help create the survey questionnaire. Recording these conversations on cassette tape or on videotape can be helpful.

- Decide what method you will use for the survey: personal interview, phone interview or mail. A mail survey may result in less accurate findings than an interview. It may cost less, however, and when respondents are strongly motivated the return can be high.

▶ Develop procedures to select and interview a representative sample of the audience you will survey. The percentage does not have to be large. For a nationwide survey of teenagers and young women, the National Cancer Institute questioned one person from each of 3,009 households. This is a larger number than that customarily used by national pollsters. For a local agency, the League of Women Voters interviewed 144 persons out of a population of 20,000 during a survey for the public library of Ridgefield, Connecticut. This number was well above the percentage needed for an accurate sample of that particular community but might be too small for communities made up of sizeable ethnic minorities or sharply differing economic levels.

In selecting the persons to be interviewed, be sure that the source from which you select your random sample does not exclude whole groups. For example, a telephone directory excludes persons who do not have phones, those who have moved recently and the increasing number of persons with unlisted numbers.

▶ Prepare a questionnaire. (This is what researchers call the "instrument.") Since a printed survey report usually includes a copy of the questionnaire, many guides are available. Things to look for: wording of questions and the form in which responses are given; the order in which questions are asked (for example, personal questions such as those relating to age, income, or education usually are placed at the end); length of the questionnaire; instructions given to the person conducting the survey.

Word questions so that the answers can be tabulated (*yes, no, never, sometimes, often, always*); use rankings and checklists.

Consider the addition of open-ended questions. These are difficult to tabulate but they will help you interpret and report your findings. They may bring forth areas you neglected to include, and they are a good source of words and phrases for future communication campaigns.

▶ Recruit and train your interviewers.

▶ Test the questionnaire on a sample of the group you will be surveying.

▶ If necessary, revise the questionnaire.

▶ If advance publicity about the survey will help you get a higher response, announce your plans.

▶ Conduct the survey. (In-person or phone interviews are the most reliable. Returns from a mailed questionnaire may be as low as 10 percent and seldom exceed 50 percent.)

▸ Tabulate and analyze the results. First, determine what you learned. Then interpret what it means. Thoughtful interpretation is as important as the collection of valid data.

▸ Report the results to the board and staff of the organization, to advisers who helped plan the survey, to those who helped conduct it, and (whenever appropriate) to those who were surveyed. Since most respondents are anonymous, general reports can be made through the organization's publications, bulletin board announcements or, on occasion, through the mass media.

▸ Use the findings to improve your agency's program.

If the purpose of a program is to change attitudes, before-and-after surveys are useful for measuring results. "Tracking" surveys that repeat the same question with similar audiences over a period of years are useful to help you identify changes. (Such surveys also demonstrate the dangers of relying on out-of-date information.) The State Communities Aid Association assessed changes in attitudes among opinion leaders in 10 New York cities who participated in its Welfare Information Project by accompanying a caseworker on a visit to a family on welfare. To study the effects of the visits, questionnaires were subsequently mailed to the participants; 79 percent responded. The results: favorable views of public welfare rose from 36 percent before the visits to 60 percent after; a majority of the visitors told others about the project; and, of these, 44 percent said they believed their friends became more sympathetic to public welfare.

Evaluations by Outside Specialists

Occasionally an organization may hire one or more outside evaluators to conduct a general audit of its public relations program. This might include a study of the program's purposes and activities, its staffing and budget, and an assessment of results. Some study of attitudes among various publics would probably be included. Among those who might conduct such a study are:

▸ Public relations specialists from a national association in the organization's field or from a collateral organization which has its own public relations staff and an effective program.

▸ Faculty from a university with graduate programs in public relations, communications, marketing or social psychology. The Public Relations Society of America can supply names of colleges and universities that offer such programs.

▶ Public relations counseling firms, especially those with experience in the nonprofit field.

If the organization is seeking professional accreditation, the public relations program will probably be part of the study.

Evaluation: Essential Function

Evaluation takes time and money that some might say should be spent instead on expanding the organization's services. The results obtained probably will be incomplete. They may even bring new problems. The process of evaluation can, however, help an organization gain financial support. Contracts and grants from government agencies are placing more emphasis on evaluation of results in terms of dollar costs and human values than previously required. Foundations, too, include evaluation methods as one criterion for awarding grants.

But is evaluation really worth the time and money it takes to do the job well? Carol Weiss wrote this about evaluation of social welfare programs in *Evaluation Research: Methods for Assessing Program Effectiveness*: "Evaluation will never provide all the answers. What it can do—and this is no minor contribution—is expose the failings of existing programs and point out the need for change. It can sometimes get publicity for the failures (and successes) of programs, help to generate interest in program effectiveness outside the narrow confines of the agency, and provide support for those reformers who seek to improve program operations."

This assessment is equally valid for public relations. Evaluation of a public relations program may not supply "all the answers." But it can provide enough of them to make it an essential function for every organization.

A Working Definition of Public Relations

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

Dr. Rex F. Harlow, APR
Public Relations Review
Winter, 1976